Kakorrhaphiophobia

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Kakorrhaphiophobia

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Summary

KAKORRHAPHIOPHOBIA noun

kak·or·rhaph·io·pho·bia, *kak-ə-ˌraf-ē-ə-ˈfō-bē-ə*
: abnormal fear of failure

Something you consider a daily occurrence others can remember and think about for decades.

Or, being forgotten is easier than forgetting.

Notes

TW: Family related-issues, Siblings conflict, Problems with self-worth, Canon-like violence

See the end of the work for more notes

There was someone uninvited in their house.

Everything pointed to this, starting from the half-eaten apple pie — which they got yesterday from Muffins, — to an evident bump on the sofa that suggested someone just got up from it, and finally ending up on the mess they *didn't* leave behind themselves.

At least some part of it, Mao Mao didn't exactly remember throwing one of his spare capes so carelessly onto the lamp this morning.

The conclusion was clear: someone was in their house and this someone had to get out, *right this instant.*

"Wah, my utensils!" A high-pitched shriek made it out of Badgerclops' throat.

And indeed, the badger was already on it to pick them all up from the ground, muttering sweet words to them as if he were calming down his crying children.

"Someone broke into our house!" Adorabat screamed, her wings fluttering faster with each word spoken.

"Yes–" But before he could finish, the youngest of their group was already on the track to find their culprit. "Adorabat!" He shouted, running after her.

"Adorabat, you can't just–!"

"Got 'em!"

"Yes, yes, but you can't– Wait." He stopped with his arm raised in the air, ready to support his lecture to the younger.

As it turned out, it will be completely unnecessary looking at the response Adorabat provided.

His trusty sword was already unleashed, aimed at whoever dared to trespass onto their territory. With its tip pointed at the newcomer Mao Mao was ready to strike in case of danger.

What he was met with though was far different from his expectations.

"Wh– AMALA?!" He shouted.

The intruder in question only raised one of her eyelids and yawned. Nothing happened for a short while. There was only a blissful moment of silence which was sometimes disturbed by Adorabat letting out struggling noises — while she was trying to climb on the resting cat's leg, — which were either way silenced by the sudden jump into action.

With grace and swiftness known only to her, Amala in one moment descended onto the floor from her previous position; where she was lying on one of the crossbeams.

With Adorabat still hanging upside down from her legs, she lightly chuckled and let her do so from her stretched-out arm.

“Who are you, mysterious stranger!” Adorabat shouted, wagging herself forward and backward.

Amala only chuckled and cooed, “Well, sweet munchkin,” pinching one of the younger’s cheeks she continued after receiving back a giggle. “I’m Amala! One of the six sisters of the Mao family, third oldest at your service!”

“Woah!” Adorabat flew down, standing before the figure of his sister that emanated power.

“You’re so cool!” Anew fluttering her wings — this time for a completely different reason, — Mao Mao couldn’t do anything more than just roll his eyes.

He *was* happy that he could see his sister, but– But he wasn’t exactly jumping in joy that they'd met here, on the outskirts of the Pure Heart Valley.

Clashing down his lips in a thin line, for now, he chose to observe. Geraldine long ago sheathed in her rightful place, he let his ears go up to sharpen his hearing.

“Mao Mao!” It was his fighting partner’s voice, crashing through the silence, and Adorabat’s sudden admiration aimed at his sister. “Any *other* family members we should be worried about?”

Before he realized, Badgerclops was standing next to him, clearly having an issue with someone who scattered his stuff around without his consent.

With his arms crossed and an unhappy grimace he squinted at Amala who was occupied by entertaining Adorabat. From what Mao Mao could hear, she was telling her some stories from her adventures.

Letting out a deep sigh, he shook his head. “No, we shouldn’t.” He gave a squint of his own at the situation beforehand. “I don’t understand though, mother should’ve informed me of any visits like these–”

“That’s because Ma doesn’t know that I’m here!”

He froze and turned around to face her. “She *doesn’t?* ” Throwing a questioning look at his sister’s way Mao Mao tried to properly comprehend what he had just heard.

“Yeah, you know how Ma is,” with calculated movements Amala threw Adorabat up in the air, the kid giggling during the process. “Before she calls,” there was suddenly a blur that whizzed past him, leaving him disoriented.

Amala, who was now in a different part of the room chuckled.

“I’m already on the move.” Whistling she ran a circle around their youngest team member. Her previous look of pure esteem changed into one of wonder.

Smirking, Amala continued, “and before she says where I should look for you,” picking up Adorabat with a squeal, his sister ran around their house with her.

“I’m already in the place.” She stopped mere inches before him. If she were anywhere closer, their faces would be touching.

Pushing her backwards, he grumbled. “That’s fantastic, amazing, but that doesn’t explain–” His sister let out an ‘oop’ sound while trying to maintain the balance. While laughing with Adorabat, she nearly tripped. “–What *are* you doing here?”

Looking at Amala, he awaited the answer.

Right next to him Badgerclops only threw him a questioning look. He must’ve been confused by the question that was balanced on the verge of hostility. Considering the fact that the previous stories of Mao Mao’s siblings he had heard were quite pleasant, his reaction wasn’t the one he expected.

“I’m visiting, of course!” Giving a cheeky reply, she showed her teeth. “Oh, that reminds me!” Her head snapping up, she ran to the part of their house where there was a kitchen.

Quickly following her, they could only watch — some with a spark of irritation, — how his older sister anew started to throw out various things to get… Something, whatever it was.

“Aha, found it!” Humming, she gave him a neatly packed object.

Confused, Mao Mao looked at her.

“It’s a soufflé, from Minori!” Waving her paw around in the air, she continued, “I actually saw Father yesterday, he told me where to find you! And, you know, I could *not* just run past this place now that I know you live here!”

“Ah, father, yes.” That… That actually explained a few things, one of them being how she found him and another how she got a soufflé from his older sibling.

Deeply exhaling, he took the cake and put it on the countertop.

“Now, what’s the fun thing you do in these parts?” Turning around, Amala circled the room for a bit before stopping in front of Adorabat.

The younger one pointed to the open door through which they came and exclaimed, “Oh, oh! There’s our Valley, and a LOT of scary, ugly, and terrifying monsters!” Each word was properly punctuated, told with the same scary tone that usually brought tension and fear to other Sweetypies hearing it.

But Amala was an adventurer, exactly like the rest of her family. Smiling, she crouched next to the bat.

“Is it giant and dangerous?” She whispered as if asking for a secret.

Adorabat’s irises as if sparkled, “Yes! Yes, it is!”

Amala gasped. “Then we have to take care of it, quick!” Taking Adorabat up on her shoulders, Adorabat giggled. “Lead the way–!”

“Adorabat!” She gleefully replied.

Nodding, Amala repeated. “Lead the way, Adorabat!”

The only thing that indicated these two previous presences was the mess his sister left behind, in pair with Adorabat’s hearty laughter.

“Woah.” Badgerclops was the first one to break the silence.

He looked down on Mao Mao, “you *really* aren’t happy she visited, aren’t you?”

Jerking back, the sheriff spluttered and got into a defensive stance.

“Bwa–! It’s not that I’m not happy to meet her, I am!” He hissed, ignoring the unimpressed gaze Badgerclops was giving him.

“Don’t look at me like that, I’m telling the truth!” Hiding his paws, he shook his head.

Not that far in the distance, he could hear Amala playing with Adorabat. They were having fun from the sounds of it, already great friends even though they just met.

Letting out a frustrated growl, Mao Mao pressed further. “It’s just that– I didn’t want to meet with any of my siblings in this place,” he pointed with his hand at the valley. “Not when I still have a great feat to accomplish, Father’s visit was an exception and I intended to keep it at that.”

Ending his response with a deep sigh, he looked at his sister. She was a free spirit, exactly like the lot of them. But despite that, she could hold up her connections and relationship with their family.

“Now that she’s here it doesn’t really matter.” Muttering only to himself, he pretended not to notice the concerned look Badgerclops sent his way.

“Well,” Badgerclops started, taking this step a tad closer to him. “You suppose your sister is easier to impress than your father?” He mused as if these words were supposed to be only for his ears.

The glance Mao Mao gave him — and the instant smile that appeared on Badgerclops’ face after he saw it, — told enough about the next sort of things they’ll be doing today.

“Operation, show Mao Mao’s a hero, approach number two I declare officially started!” And hearing his friend’s laughter eased his worries a little, even if it was for a moment.

———

“Ooooh, so you bake pies *and* cakes!”

Eagerly nodding, Muffins responded. “The bestest in the whole Pure Heart Valley!” Smiling, she took one of her freshest batches and reached out with it towards Amala. “Here, you can have cookies, don’t limit yourself!”

“Well, if you insist~!” Taking one, Mao Mao could only observe as his sister made yet another friend.

Sighing, he massaged the bridge between his eyes and mumbled something incomprehensible.

“DUDE!” Badgerclops, the very same one who was the first to jump into the mission of ‘Impressing his older sister’, was currently occupied with eating a pie of his own.

That was cooled down by Amala.

With the help of her running around the valley.

Not only that, somehow, his sister during her run helped not only with this matter. She also, while holding at least six of the baked goods in *one* of her hands — while another had an equal amount of them, — ran so fast she powered the windmills outside the gates.

With that, the energy the Pure Heart Valley normally used got an excess amount of it. Meaning, the electricity that sometimes was hard to get by during the sunniest of days was with Amala’s help stored in the nearby tanks in advance.

She didn’t even have to try and come up with a solution for this problem; which she didn’t know existed in the first place.

His sister was truly amazing, that he had to admit.

Didn’t mean it hasn't left a bitter aftertaste in his mouth at how effortlessly she fixed something he made a twelve-step plan for.

Huffing, he looked at Badgerclops devouring his pastry.

“What?” He huffed.

“Oh man, you didn’t tell me your sister was so helpful!” Taking the last bite he finished his portion, licking his fingers in the process. “And she helped with the windmill problem! Not permanently, but she just *shwoosh!* Ran and solved it like that, and here I thought I’d have to run next week for hours like you told me I’d have, haha!”

“You say so?” Attempting to look unbothered Mao Mao forced a smile and said the next words through his clenched teeth. “Amazing.”

"…Oh." Badgerclops must've realized the point of their visit to the valley's centre presumed a different outcome.

"I mean," finding a new motivation, Badgerclops' mechanical arm stretched out and tangled in a mess around both him and his team leader.

Grumbling in response, Mao Mao rolled his eyes. He started to like this plan less and less.

———

"Oh my, thank you, thank you!" Amala laughed while she was smothered in another wave of admiration from Sweetypies living in the valley.

"You didn't have to, it was no problem!" This time, Mao Mao could swear his pulse *did* skip a beat.

Amala, *again* by simply appearing made the day better.

The moment they visited the other black cat couldn't prevent herself from speeding over the mountains and forests, easily noticing there was a monster lair nearby their current location.

Without further ado — nor asking any unnecessary questions, — one second she was in front of them only to disappear for the next ten. To come back in the next few with an… Impressive-looking beast's head held over her own, carrying it as if its weight didn't have any effect on her.

With a proud grin, she claimed "I took care of your monster, you're welcome!" And dusted off her paws.

It took her less than a minute and Mao Mao couldn't fight the grimace at the sight of the Valley's inhabitants crowding around her.

"Oh man, good she took care of it, the head itself is huuuge." And, yes; the size *was* exactly that.

But it was supposed to be *them* who were supposed to impress his sister, not the other way around! They were capable and righteous warriors, they simply didn't have a good opportunity to show their capabilities yet!

At least that was what he told himself through his friend's rambling.

"–Like, we probably could totally take it but I don't really have anything against her taking care of it, y'know. And she did, in a few seconds! Man, would actually kill to have the same speed as her, do you know how she does tha–"

Mao Mao growled, finally interrupting him. The pointed glare he sent the other's way didn't make him pause immediately, but the second Badgerclops caught on how they were supposed to be handling the fighting, his mouth formed into an 'o' shape.

"Oh." He muttered, blinking at the scenery in front of him with a newfound uneasy grimace.

"Maybe, y'know, there'll be another chance for su–"

"Badgerclops–" Mao Mao started but couldn't bring himself to finish.

Sighing, he massaged the bridge between his eyes and closed them.

At some point, the sheriff looked up, willingness to move on from this situation clear in his voice. "Maybe we should take a di–"

"WATCH OUUUUT!"

On instinct, he jumped in exactly the right moment to miss the giant claw that would crush him.

Unsheathing Geraldine, he looked around and could hear Badgerclops' laser cannon warming up, getting ready to shoot at any time.

"WHAT WAS THAT?!" Shouting, he turned around to be met with a snout similar to the beasts that his sister had recently slain. In comparison to Amala's one though, this one was definitely on the smaller side.

"It might seem that Junior came to seek revenge." He heard his sister's voice and the following laughter that cracked at certain times.

Growling, he was ready to reply with a remark of his own.

Before Badgerclops stopped him, "dude!" Not letting his guard down with his eyes on the monster, his ears turned around to listen. "Now's a perfect chance, show her what you're capable of!"

And– And yes, his friend was right! Now was the perfect occasion to show how much he had grown from the last time they had seen each other, oh! Oh, he could already taste the sweet feeling of his sister's praises aimed towards him. Victory, here he came!

With a snap of his gloves, he successfully caught their youngest team member's attention. "Adorabat, confuse it with your scream!"

Excited but serious, she nodded. "On it, Sheriff!" And was already on her way to do so.

"What!?" A surprised exclamation rang behind him, someone's voice full of worry and bafflement, but he had a monster to kill, and a sister to impress! It was an identical situation like with his father, but this time he had to show and be at his best capacity from the beginning!

Running up the monster's arm he quickly made his way up. The roar it made threw him for a moment off-balance, but he quickly stabilized himself on its snout.

His team members were in the middle of distracting it, making sure he would have enough time to prepare his body for the final blow.

With a smirk, he clenched his fists on Geraldine.

"RAAHHH!" He shouted while successfully landing and turning around only when he heard the head's heavy thud.

"Well, that was easy." He mused to himself.

"WE DID ITTT!!" Adorabat screamed and threw herself at him. Mao Mao laughed at her antics and petted her shoulder as he usually did.

"Woohoo!" Their final member joined and high-fived him. "Great job everyone!"

"We did so well!" Wagging her legs behind, Adorabat rested on the top of his head.

"We did, Mao Mao, go boast about it to your sister!" Right, his sister!

Turning around he was ready to join where she previously stood–

Only to bump into her because she was already in front of him.

Landing on his butt, confused at the sudden collision, he rubbed the place where they bumped and glanced up at her. He expected her to be happy at how well they managed, on how the job they did was clean and quick; exactly like she liked.

But no, his older sister's face wasn't showing any sign of happiness. Rather than that, with her arms crossed over her torso, she glared at him and tapped her paw, impatiently.

" *What* was that." She didn't growl, but the message was clear; something about how they handled this matter made her unhappy. Moreso, Mao Mao would risk saying she was mad.

Sneakily — as he hoped it was, — he turned his eyes in his teammate's direction in the hope of getting eventual help. He didn't– Maybe they noticed something his sister would be angry about, there must've been something, right?

Badgerclops, who was even more perplexed than him, only shrugged his shoulders in response. Adorabat on the other hand shook her head, puzzled by Amala's reaction.

"Look at me, brother." She hissed, immediately making him do as she said.

Speechless and feeling like he was put under the spotlight — *not* in a way he liked, — he waited for her to say something else.

"Do you have *anything* to say for yourself?" Her paw bumped faster, giving the impression that the following seconds were dragging endlessly.

When she didn't receive the response she expected, she looked at him baffled.

"You–" She hissed, muttering something that they were unable to hear. With another hiss, she came back to glare at him. "Do you have *any* idea how *dangerous* that was?" Pressing onto the word dangerous, she growled.

Spluttering, he found his words after a while. "I– Of course I know how dangerous that was, how could I not!? Our family deals with danger all the time!" Standing up, he didn't even bother to shake off the dust that gathered on his cape.

"Well, excuse me for thinking otherwise, what were you thinking!" Throwing her hands up, Amala snarled.

Keeping his posture and preventing himself from jerking back, Mao Mao also raised his voice.

"What do you mean?!"

"What–" Now it was Amala's turn to take a step back. He seemed to catch her off guard, making her lose her posture.

"What," she laughed but it was weak. The hysteric tune it had was something he only heard a few times while they were still living together.

His sister quickly shook off the moment of shock. Its place was taken by anger that returned with double the force and heat in her voice.

"You put others into danger!"

"No, I did not!" Mao Mao was quick to deny, "Sweetypies know to escape from the danger as soon as a fight starts, there's no one currently with u–"

"I'm not talking about them," Amala interrupted. "I'm talking about her!" With that, Mao Mao followed the direction his finger was pointing at.

And found Adorabat at the end of it.

Finding himself baffled anew, he looked back and forth between Aorabat and his sister.

Amala's harsh growl was the thing that broke off any further continuation of his action.

"Something could've happened to her!"

"Hey! I know how to take care of myself!" Adorabat shouted, but Amala ignored her.

Her sight focused primarily on him, giving him a feeling of his bravery crumbling under her gaze. Gulping, he tried to have a say.

"Adorabat's capable of taking care of he–"

“She’s a *child!* ” Amala pressed.

Finally taking a step back, removing herself from his personal space she slowly started invading, she tangled one of her paws into her fur while the second was occupied with clenching onto itself. The force with which she performed it was starting to leave a mark on her skin, but she also ignored it.

“Mao Mao, I had– I had you for a more responsible person, with you being the youngest and all of that, she– Look at her!” With the sudden attention turned on them, Badgerclops and Adorabat slightly jumped from her sudden outburst and stiffened in place. “She’s a child, and she’s *tiny* !”

“But–”

“Don’t say she’s capable, she’s young, just like you were!” She clenched her teeth. “Gosh, and father was here and he didn’t say anything, what was *he* thinking?! Letting you parade with this kid, experiencing the danger firsthand!” The words were spit out faster and faster, her scarf charging her with energy that was starting to be pent up.

Small sparkles were coming off from the top of her whiskers, and Mao Mao’s sight for a single moment focused fully on them.

“Honestly, what were *you* thinking!” She accused.

Not noticing it when he loosened his fists. Without showing any visible sign that Amala’s words affected him, he started.

“Adorabat’s one of our team members–”

“She’s ten at best!”

Mao Mao’s face irked with irritation. “She *is* capable, she can take care of herself and if not we’re here to help!” He didn’t notice the vigorous nodding that the topic of their conversation was giving them.

“That doesn’t mean she should do that, you– You also are young, why are *you* seeking danger so much, do you want to get hurt?! I won’t be here to catch you like I did when we were younger, nor any of our siblings!”

At that moment, Mao Mao froze.

Because. Because the anger, the willingness to jump at him the second he was done with his fight– It all made sense, his sister was angry at him on Adorabat’s behalf.

But also because she didn’t see him as a capable person himself.

It was hard to shine among his other family members, where everyone was a great adventurer or hero in one way or another. The amazing traits his siblings had were that; perfect and mastered to their fullest capacity. And the weapons his father gave them at the ceremony added to the abilities they could use.

Which, he shouldn't be that surprised, really. He knew Geraldine wasn't as powerful as any of his sisters' objects, but– But he still hoped to achieve great things with her.

And he knew, he *knew* the fact of him being the youngest waged with itself the consequences; constant babying and looking down on him by the others they discovered his status. Naive, tactless–

But the dim light that burned inside of him, that assured him Amala wasn't someone who he should worry about when it came to showing such approach– It all sparked a fire, louder and larger than anyone could anticipate.

"You," he gritted his teeth. "You, for all this time, you– You didn't think of me as an equal."

Amala's irises widened. Taken aback by his reaction, the lighting that had previously surrounded her body faded.

"You thought– *I* thought, that from all of our family members, from everyone who would think of me still as a child, *you* would be the last one–" He didn't care he was shouting, the tension inside his body screeching to be let out in the most violent of ways. "But it seems I was wrong!" He accused.

"It– For how much longer you all are going to see me as some *kid* , a child you have to protect and have to take care of!?"

"Mao Mao–"

"Don't!" He threw his trembling paw up to stop her.

From her angry expression, there was nothing left, the sole emotion shown on her face resembled anguish.

But whatever it was she had to say, he didn't want to hear it.

Turning around, not planning to cross their sights, he looked in Badgerclops' and Adorabat's direction. The worried glances he had only now realized they must have had for the whole time made his mood sour even more.

"I'm going to train." Letting his cape hide him, he marched in the direction of their home, not caring not bothering to take into account anything happening behind him.

Yesterday…

"Ah, Amala! Come, come, sit down child!" Ah, it was her father!

Only after a moment, she noticed him from the leftover rumble she had to jump in-between. Good to know she correctly guessed a fight had its place not that long ago. Thankfully, the scarf she was gifted had its advantages not only when it came to running; she could easily hear the environment with its perks of sound arriving faster to her ears than it normally should. Handy thing to have during a crisis situation.

Or a sudden family meeting, like this one.

“Oh, sure!” She replied while avoiding falling columns that decided to give out at the last minute.

That meant the fight was fresh, a good timing from her side she supposed.

“Have you heard, your sister defeated a seven-headed hydra while baking a souffle! Truly, a magnificent achievement!” Her father roared with laughter and reached his hand to pat said sister on the back. He quickly averted himself mid the process though after remembering Minori tended to avoid any form of closeness.

As if appreciating the gesture, Minori let her stone face for a moment show a glimpse of a smile.

Humming, she spoke.

“It was a mere inconvenience.” The voice of her younger sibling was as she remembered, smooth but mysterious to the ears.

Smiling, Amala sat down next to her family and welcomed herself to take a piece of her own.

The pie was just like she remembered, soft and buttery on the tongue, immediately melting away the accumulated pressure and stress on her shoulders.

Raising her head, Amala let out a fully satisfied groan and took another bite.

“Fis is shooo ghood~!” Swallowing, she turned around to the older, “You outdone yourself with this one, it’s delicious!”

Minori, as she tended to, pretended the warm words didn’t affect her.

Taking a bite of her own, her sister’s fur puffed in a specific manner only when she was satisfied. It glistered in the sunset in various shades of pink, from rose to lavender.

“Sole praises never lead anyone anywhere, sister.” Opening one of her eyes, Minori leveled her with a stare. “But don’t deny yourself giving them, maybe you’ll be the first to prove otherwise.” To a pedestrian, the words might’ve sounded harsh.

But Amala knew better, it was her sister’s way of showing acknowledgment, in that teasing manner of hers.

Beaming at her, Amala chuckled. “Guess I’ll be the first one to find out, I’m never stepping down from a challenge~!” Humming a simple tune she ignored how the younger for the additional dramatic effect rolled comically her eyes under her hat.

Taking a bite, Amala beamed at her.

The next couple of minutes were spent peacefully, in a nice atmosphere that accompanied them. The warm feeling of meeting her family let Amala think of possible conversation starters, looking that it wasn’t often she met more than one family member in one place, at the same time.

“Have any of you visited Ma lately?” She perked up after a moment.

Most of the cakes were slowly getting finished, her father being already done with his.

Taking a handkerchief with embroidered initials right next to a set of red flowers, he wiped his hands and muzzle.

“I was actually combing back to her, before I got a call from your sister who asked to pay her a visit before coming home.” With a calculated movement, he put the cloth in one of his pockets.

Humming, Minori nodded. It was a signal for Amala that she probably already asked the same question — or a variation of it, looking at her rather specific way of caring for others and wording it — before her arrival.

“Is she alright, does she need anything?” She pried, hoping to push forward with the topic.

It had been a while since she last visited her mother. Maybe she should drop by during one of her slower days, bring with her at the same time some kind of souvenir so she could put it on a shelf, as she tended to do.

Shin Mao's laugh was light-hearted, “ah! No, no, I already plan to take care of a request she made before I left to visit Mew Mew.”

Immediately, Amala’s ears perked up.

She would only realize afterwards while in the middle of trying to discover her new destination’s location; the detail that Minori suddenly froze the second these words left their father’s mouth.

Right now though she was more occupied with gathering more intel; she was curious! It had been a hot while since she heard about her brother, and it was from her father no less! As much as every member of their family loved him, he could end up occupied more often than not.

That’s why, catching his attention — unless something worthy of it — happened was bordering on impossible. ‘Bordering’ because in the end he always eventually gave it, be it later than sooner.

Mao Mao though, as the youngest from their bunch, had it the hardest. Amala liked to think she had a good relationship with all of her siblings, not taking into account the one she had with the second youngest — it was unfair to others, she got along with said sister like a house on fire, — and Mao Mao wasn't an exception.

She knew he had some kind of conflict with Brunhilde, but she wasn't privy to the details. Even though everyone in the family knew about it, — or, at least everyone besides their parents, — it was something they had to work through together, without any audience.

In any case, that was Amala's opinion if she had any in this matter.

"You visited brother! Is he somewhere around?" Taking the last bite of the soufflé, she asked.

But her excitement was let out prematurely. With a shake of his head, Shin Mao followed, "no, your brother stays in the…" Mumbling to himself, he rubbed his lower jaw. "Pure… Dart? No, no. It was something else, pure, pure, pure, pure… Ah! Pure Heart Valley, yes." Nodding to himself, he looked at Amala.

"Your brother made his home around the outskirts of the valley parts, a small little structure, the one he's living in, but suppose if that satisfies him" He finished by taking a sip of a juice that Minori prepared, knowing well he would be thirsty.

"Hm." Humming she put down her plate. "Maybe I'll check what he's doing before dropping by Ma's, it's been a while since I last saw him."

Minori, who kept quiet until this very moment, caught their attention by popping another bottle's cork off. Pouring the juice into another cup, she gave it to Amala. Mouthing a 'thank you', her inner self purred at the sweet plum taste that hit her at once.

"If you do so," Minori started, "you can take a portion of the soufflé and spare him some, who knows what he's been up to these days." It was exactly like Amala remembered, Minori playing unbothered while her minuscule actions showed she thought the opposite; she worried and cared.

"Oh, good point!" Vigorously nodding, she began to pack some of the leftovers.

When she was done tying the package, she stood up and stretched, her bones making a satisfying pop sound in the process.

"Ah, I'm not used to sitting in one place for so long, you'll have to excuse me." She ignored her sister's huff at her theatrical antics and focused on her father's laughter.

Replying with a chuckle of her own, she saluted them both. "I'll be going then! Do you have any tips on what I should look for, Father?"

"You couldn't possibly miss it, Mee Moo's living around one of these similarly looking structures that resemble a crystal heart," he added something after that, but Amala deemed it not important.

Taking her position, she let her muscles tense and cracked her head to the shoulders; smiling, before any of her family members realized it, she was long gone to see her brother.

———

“Hey.” Amala attempted to start the conversation simply, with a greeting.

Mao Mao’s hitting didn’t stop, she dared to say its force was even greater. The training puppet took the hit, a small part of the material flying away while a new rip appeared.

Rubbing her arm and looking aside, she tried again.

“Hey, Mao Mao–” She paused.

When she brought her head up she was met with the sight of her brother, fighting the monster together with his teammates.

But when she blinked, for a moment there was something else.

She couldn’t remember when it was, only that it was raining during that time. They were young, much younger than currently, both of them full of childish glee — the very same she could see in the eyes of Adorabat, — that motivated and made them sure they could reach the sky.

She was the third oldest, the sister Mao Mao could always lean on, and not only her.

It happened in a forest, she was the one who took the mantle of taking care of young Mao Mao, promising their mother she would ensure his safety.

When asked about it some day his brother told her he didn’t remember much, how could he; he was just a child, a mere kid she swore to protect.

“Hey,” she started, the words feeling… Different on her tongue in comparison to the ones before.

Mao Mao didn’t stop, the dummy getting hit upon hit repeatedly.

“I’m– I’m sorry.” She choked.

And she couldn’t bring herself to say anything else because– Because it was true, wasn’t it? Her brother pointed out something she had tried to battle with for so long, denying it while she knew the truth was far different.

“This– I know you are grown up, you left the house at such a young age, promising you’ll bring Ma the greatest souvenir–” At that her brother’s shoulder jolted, but his back was still turned to her.

“You are… You are more than capable, I guess–” She gulped, a lone tear falling from one of her cheeks.

Wiping it away with her thumb, she coughed.

“I guess I was just stuck, in the memory, of– Of you being the same Mao Mao I remembered.” Pointing her look down, she adjusted her scarf.

It was… Scary to think about it. That her family while she was adventuring on her own grew up, made friends and connections without her to witness it. She could, to some extent, understand her sister; two of them were older than her, making it impossible to share the world they did.

And she– She *knew* she couldn’t be there for everything, especially since she was always running, but maybe, just maybe, if she ran fast enough she could see her siblings achieve their biggest milestones with her right next to them.

It seemed though that in the fervour of emotions and memories, she forgot she’s only one person.

And no matter how hard she tried; she couldn’t always be with them. Especially when they started to lead a life of their own, on their separate paths to being a hero that the world will remember.

“I’m–” She slowly started. Her paws flexing on instinct, unused to the slow motion she was letting her body rest in. “I’m truly sorry.”

For the first time from the moment she barged into his dojo, Mao Mao looked up at her with eyes full of bewilderment.

It hurt, now that she had to meet the bitter truth she was faced with.

She grimaced. “I– I really, *really* am sorry.” With her eyes wandering aside, her shoulders rose to try and hide her face. It wasn’t successful, she knew it. “Words cannot describe how sorry I am for– For everything, for treating you like you aren’t enough, for letting you believe that, for–” She fell silent.

Her voice was getting desperate, an emotion that seemed so unfit for her every time she thought about it.

She was supposed to be older, smarter, and better than that sibling. She was supposed to be an example, the one that her younger sisters and brother could look up to.

But during her own journey of fulfillment… She must’ve forgotten she wasn’t the only one who did.

“For…” bringing her eyes up, she looked Mao Mao in the eyes. They were glassy, a sign that he was close to tears.

It took her a moment to convince herself to persist and not be a coward; no matter the outcome she must bear the consequences of her own actions.

That's what Mao Mao deserved; her for once being honest.

"For making you feel unworthy of being a part of our family." Letting out a shaky breath she choked down a sob.

She wasn't in the position to weep, not when the one suffering the most was Mao Mao.

He was someone she took for granted, someone who'll always be there; unchanged.

But during the time when she ran so carelessly, without a single worry on her mind she forgot that people won't wait. They have their own lives and won't be standing still for her to grow on her own, they'll go on their journeys.

Truly, it was a miracle that Mao Mao still saw her as someone worthy of his love when she made him feel like he was less than enough.

"You're more than enough," through falling tears down her cheeks she shakily muttered, "little brother."

The sight of stunned Mao Mao will be something that she'll forever remember.

It was pitiful, the state both of them were in. At the top of the hill near her brother's house, crying their souls out with her admitting the faults she was so eager to keep hidden.

"I'm–" She started again, the adrenaline pumping in her veins. The lack of reaction from Mao Mao proved to be a much larger weight than she foresaw, but she couldn't find it in herself to complain.

The consequences of her own actions did bite her in the ass, who would've guessed.

Hiccupping, she shook her head and carried on further, "I'm so–" Letting out a loud and sudden breath of air she almost fell over.

Looking down she was met with the sight she couldn't expect would happen in her most lucid dreams; it was Mao Mao, previously standing but now he threw himself at her, hugging her dearly as if delaying it for any longer would make her disappear.

With hesitation, she cupped her brother's back of head and slowly, she embraced him in return.

"I've missed you." And oh–

Oh, her brother's voice sounded so small, so broken. She forgot why she wanted to become a hero in the first place, to protect what was dear to her. And in the midst of her search for it, she didn't realize the most important part of her life was there all along; waiting for her to notice.

“I love you, Mao Mao.” His body became weightless, it was now leaning onto hers.

Gently, she stroked her brother’s head, at the same time resting her own on his.

“I love you, you’re the best thing that could ever happen to me.”

“I–” He stopped and took a deep breath. It took a moment for him to continue but Amala could wait, “I love you, sister.”

The final blow made her crumble. Halting everything in her, making her ears ring, and focusing only on this moment.

She smiled, hugging Mao Mao tighter.

“I love you, I love you, Mao Mao, I love you more than anything.” And if needed, she would repeat this phrase more than once.

End Notes

I was in the mood to :rainbow: write about family feels :rainbow: with sprinkled angst in-between /lh
Alas, this was actually written by a person who's an *older* sibling but has a pack of friends who joke back and forth about being the parent of said author — as you can see, I had a lot of material to work with /j /lh
Jokes aside, it was a pleasure to write for this fandom! Exploring characters of Minori ad Amala — with the crumbs of information we were given, or more like NONE of them, — was such a fun experience, I one hundred percent plan to write something more including the Mao family and the struggles they're dealing with :DD!
This story is also, as some of you might've noticed, a gift for @sonicthehedgehodlover2! Hope you liked the story, y wanted some angst and the moment I read your request I *knew* I had to write for the MM:HoPH fandom, it was such a lovely place when it was first growing, one of the best fandoms I've been in <33!
Thank you for reading and remember to hydrate on your way out!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!